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United Kingdom

Asparagus

Annual

2002

Approved by:
Peter O. Kurz
U.S. Embassy, London

Prepared by:
Phil Bicknell

Report Highlights: CY2002 UK asparagus production is forecast at 1,980 MT, a considerable increase on the poor harvest of 2001. Imports are forecast to fal from the levels seen in CY2001, when the trade looked to overseas suppliers to make up the shortfall in the domestic harvest. Consequently, CY2002 imports are forecast at 4,400 MT. The U.S. remains a major source for imported asparagus, although Spain and Peru have strengthened their market share.

Includes PSD changes: Yes
Includes Trade Matrix: Yes
Annual Report
London [UK1], UK

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PS&D Table

PSD Table						
Country	United Kingdom					
Commodity	Fresh Asparagus				(HA)(MT)	
	Revised	2000	Preliminary	2001	Forecast	2002
	Old	New	Old	New	Old	New
Market Year Begin		01/2000		01/2001		01/2002
Area Planted	819	819	820	843	0	856
Area Harvested	819	819	820	843	0	856
TOTAL Production	1791	1791	1799	1555	0	1980
Imports, Fresh	3977	3977	4100	4913	0	4400
TOTAL SUPPLY	5768	5768	5899	6468	0	6380
Exports, Fresh	32	32	50	36	0	40
Domestic Fresh Market	5736	5736	5849	6432	0	6340
For Processing	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL UTILIZATION	5768	5768	5899	6468	0	6380

Production

UK fresh asparagus production for CY2002 is forecast at 1,980 MT, showing an increase of 27 percent over 2001 production. The 2001 crop was characterized by below average yields, with wet weather and low soil temperatures combining to hinder crop growth and delay harvesting. Data from the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs estimates CY2001 production at just 1,555 MT, the lowest for several years despite a 3 percent increase in planted area.

Weather conditions have been more congenial to the current crop, although where fern growth was poor last year, some crops have been late to start this year and strong winds have led to limited spear distortion. Overall, warm sunny weather at the beginning of April allowed an early start to harvesting and left some growers anticipating a 10 week marketing season instead of the normal 6-8 week season. With improved growing conditions, yields have been impressive, particularly following CY2001's low yielding crop. Current crop yields look set to surpass those recorded from 1999 through 2001. This forecast yield improvement, coupled with a marginal increase in planted area signals a return toward 1998 and 1999 crop levels. CY2002 sees the continuation of the upward trend in planted area and with some large scale growers set to increase acreage in coming years, this trend shows no sign of abating.

The major asparagus growing areas are Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire in the East, Essex and Kent in the South East and the Vale of Evesham in Central England. Planting of crowns takes in place in February, and harvest typically begins in mid-April, continuing to the middle or end of June. UK commercial production is monopolized by green varieties; purple and white varieties have been trialed in the past with little success. European

varietals dominate in the UK, accounting for approximately 90 percent of sales of UK asparagus. However, the introduction of Jersey varieties (developed by Rutgers University in New Jersey), and Jersey Giant in particular, have the potential to challenge this stronghold. Not only is Jersey Giant an early variety with the potential of lengthening the asparagus season, but its appearance and taste are finding favor with supermarkets and consumers alike.

Consumption

Although asparagus consumption has been on the increase, relatively few consumers purchase it frequently. Still strongly regarded as a luxury vegetable, as little as 3 percent of shoppers regularly place asparagus in their shopping cart. Suppliers and retailers recognize the huge potential to develop sales from this low level of consumer penetration and future growth is inevitable. Global suppliers assure that asparagus is on offer to retail and catering markets all year round. In the retail sector, asparagus is increasingly sold in pre-packs with trimmed spears and tips, accentuating a product which is already visually appealing. Adding health benefits and product versatility further reinforces the growth prospects for asparagus.

Retail sales of asparagus in the year to April 28, 2002 were approximately US\$21 million. Supermarkets accounted for 79 percent of this trade and their share is growing. In keeping with its position as a luxury vegetable, asparagus is also a favorite with the foodservice sector, particularly the high-end restaurants. Foodservice outlets tend to use long shoots with a wide diameter, while packs of shorter and narrower shoots are favored by the retail trade. Therefore, although no data is available, the widely held belief among the trade is that the majority of U.S. asparagus is sold through foodservice outlets rather than through supermarket chains, where Peruvian and Spanish asparagus dominates.

Trade

The poor UK asparagus crop of last year contributed to a significant leap in import volumes in 2001. Almost 5,000 tonnes of asparagus was imported compared with less than 4,000 tonnes in CY2000. CY2002 import volumes are forecast to fall back to 4,400 tonnes following the improved UK crop.

Peru and Spain remain the key suppliers to the UK market and have strengthened their position by more than doubling their shipments to the UK since 1998. However, this is partly linked to UK companies establishing overseas operations in an effort to guarantee year round supplies for the supermarket sector. The majority of Spanish asparagus arrives in the UK from March to June, with Peruvian supplies coming online from July until the end of the year. In the first three months of 2002, U.S. asparagus exporters have lost share to these suppliers and also face increasing competition from Thailand, which is another favored location for joint ventures by UK companies.

Import Matrix

Country	United Kingdom		
Commodity	Fresh Asparagus		
Time period	Jan -Dec	Units:	MT
Imports for:	2000		2001

U.S.	413	U.S.	409
Others		Others	
Peru	1346	Spain	1851
Spain	1220	Peru	1722
France	249	Thailand	222
South Africa	137	Netherlands	176
Netherlands	115	South Africa	159
Thailand	111	France	129
Italy	95	Chile	81
Chile	94	Italy	46
Guatemala	43	Guatemala	46
China	35	Mexico	20
Total for Others	3445		4452
Others not Listed	119		52
Grand Total	3977		4913

Export Matrix

Country	United Kingdom		
Commodity	Fresh Asparagus		
Time period	Jan - Dec	Units:	MT
Exports for:	2000		2001
U.S.	0	U.S.	0
Others		Others	
Ireland	20	Ireland	24
Belgium-Lux	5	Belgium	5
France	3	Italy	4
		France	1
		Iran	1
Total for Others	28		35
Others not Listed			1

Grand Total	28		36
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Marketing

The UK Asparagus Growers' Association (AGA) undertakes trade PR activity to coincide with the beginning of the UK season. The aim of the campaign is to generate awareness among the fresh produce trade that British asparagus is now available and to reinforce product attributes. This year, activity included trade press coverage of delivery by sports car of the first spears of the British asparagus harvest to the Savoy, a top London hotel. However, AGA does not undertake any paid advertising and Post is not aware of any promotional activity by other competitors.

Policy

All product marketed in the UK is subject to compliance with EU quality standards, pesticide and plant health legislation. Full details of the marketing standards for asparagus are available from the UK's Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs website: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/hort/hmi/common/standard/msaspr.pdf>

At the time of writing, green asparagus imports from the U.S. are subject to the full duty rate of 10.2 percent, as classified under Commodity Code 0709 20 00 10.